

“YEAH, BUT...”

FROM WHY WORK SUCKS AND HOW TO FIX IT



“WELL WE ALREADY DO THAT HERE...”

Before you jump to this conclusion, ask yourself if any of the following statements are true:

1. We have policies around which days are office/home days, or how many days in a year employees must be in the office.
2. It is culturally appropriate and expected that when you're late to a meeting to give a socially acceptable reason (like traffic, sick kid, etc).
3. It is culturally appropriate to tell someone where you are or what you're doing from 9-5, but not appropriate before 9 or after 5.
4. Expecting people to be available during core hours.
5. Using deadline language like ASAP, when you get a chance, sometime next week, or any other ambiguous language.
6. Subscribing to the belief that people are more efficient and effective when they're all working at the same time or from the same place all of the time.

Note: If the answer to any of these questions is “yes,” then you're still operating under the status-quo



“PEOPLE WILL TAKE ADVANTAGE AND SLACK OFF.”

First, people are taking advantage and slacking off now. The reason you can't tell is because you're measuring them with a combination of results and time. In a ROWE, if you don't get results then you don't get to keep your job. The slackers either shape up or they get fired. Meanwhile, the good employees work even harder because they are being rewarded with control over their time.



“THIS WILL WORK FOR SOME PEOPLE, BUT NOT EVERYONE. SOME PEOPLE SIMPLY NEED MORE SUPERVISION.”

People don't need supervision. They need a clear idea of what they need to do and a clear sense of when it needs to be done. If you call your deli and ask them to deliver you a delicious turkey sandwich in the next half hour, then you don't need to then go down there to watch them make it and then follow the delivery guy back to your office. You trust that they are going to deliver on expectations. And if they don't deliver a delicious turkey sandwich in a half hour, then you have two choices: complain and hope that service improves or switch delis.



“RELATIONSHIPS ARE SO IMPORTANT. WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO RELATIONSHIPS?”

Relationships are important. And relationships will be fine. We assume that we're improving relationships with people because we're all in the same building together. But being together doesn't guarantee that people are connecting. In a ROWE, people work on their relationships with more purpose. Because you can't assume people will be around, you make career development, mentoring and coaching a part of the results to be delivered. No more taking people for granted.



“HOW WILL WE KNOW IF PEOPLE ARE PUTTING IN 40 HOURS (OR THE SPECIFIED NUMBER OF HOURS I WANT)?”

You don't know. Because it doesn't matter. In a ROWE, you measure someone's performance based on results. You tell them what they're supposed to do and they either deliver or they don't. Time is not a factor. People start performing rather than putting in time.



“WHAT IF EVERYONE DECIDES NOT TO WORK AT THE SAME TIME?”

That depends. Does the job require that people work at the same time? Because if the outcome doesn't demand that everyone works at the same time, then the answer to that question is “That's fine.” But if the job requires certain people to be together or coordinate their efforts at the same time, then the answer to that question is “Then that's what they'll do.”

ROWE gives employees power over how they work and when they work, but they still have to work. They are still responsible for serving the customer, whether that customer is internal or external. That sense of responsibility—coupled with the power to meet those responsibilities how they want—actually breeds higher performance. People don't even think about blowing off work in a ROWE.

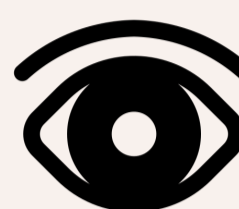


“HOW CAN YOU ADVANCE YOUR CAREER IF NO ONE SEES YOU WORKING?”

This sounds like the kind of worry that keeps people from participating in current flexible work arrangements. We fear that if we're not putting in enough “face time” then we won't get credit for the work. First, a ROWE doesn't mean that no one ever sees anyone ever again, or that everyone works at home. So people will see you do your thing. But more importantly, you will be measured more for actual performance than perceived performance. If you're given a goal and you meet that goal, then that is what will advance your career whether anyone sees you do it or not. You get ahead through actual achievement, not looking like you're an achiever.

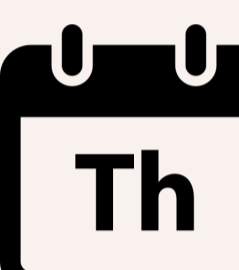
“HOW CAN YOU EVER REACH ANYBODY IF THEY'RE NOT IN THE OFFICE?”

People are more reachable now than they ever have been in human history. People have cell phones. They are on e-mail. They don't need a workstation. They don't need a phone with a cord that plugs into the wall to be reachable. In a ROWE, if you need to reach someone, you e-mail them or you call them. But here is another thought: when you're clear about timetables, outcomes and expectations, a lot of those spontaneous requests dry up. You start to anticipate your own questions. You plan better so you have fewer emergencies. You don't casually stop by someone's office and interrupt their work so you can get the answer to one question. You work with more purpose.



“HOW WILL WE KNOW IF WORK IS GETTING DONE IF WE CAN'T SEE PEOPLE?”

How do you know now? In today's economy, people work with information. They talk on the phone. They type on their computers. If you walk by a row of cubicles, you don't know for a fact that the people are actually working or if they're just looking busy. In a ROWE, you know the work is getting done because you've been crystal clear about goals and expectations. X is to be delivered to Y on such-and-such a date. If people don't deliver the work, you know immediately, and can act accordingly.



“HOW CAN YOU SCHEDULE MEETINGS IF YOU DON'T KNOW WHEN PEOPLE ARE WORKING?”

In a ROWE, you can no longer casually schedule a meeting. You don't schedule meetings based around time. You schedule meetings based on outcome. If the outcome requires that people attend, then they will attend. If they don't need to be there in person, they can send a representative, or they can provide the information they're supposed to deliver ahead of time.



“WHAT ABOUT TEAMS?”

Teams are overrated. In a ROWE, people stop teaming because they feel obligated to team. So there is no more teaming for the sake of teaming, because it's fashionable or expected. People team up because the outcome requires it. In fact, teams get much stronger in a ROWE because there is natural cross training. Because you can't assume that people are going to be in the office (including yourself), teammates make sure they can support each other in an emergency.



“IF THERE'S NO LINE BETWEEN WORK AND LIFE, HOW WILL I KEEP FROM OVERWORKING?”

There is no line between work and life because you have control over both work and life. So you don't overwork because there is no incentive to overwork. You aren't getting rewarded for putting in more hours. You are no longer a hero for pulling an all-nighter or being the first one through the door in the morning or working on the weekend. You're only rewarded for delivering results. Once you've delivered those results, you stop working and do something else. It's nice.



“A MANAGER NEEDS TO BE THERE FOR THEIR PEOPLE.”

We appreciate that a lot of managers genuinely care about their employees. We also suspect that there are managers out there who have built their identity on showing that they care. “I need to be there for my people,” they say. “My people count on me.” But there is more to being there for someone than physical availability. You can still be there for your people by giving them clear goals and expectations. You can be there by coaching their development, removing obstacles that fall in their path. Perhaps the best way to be there for them is to leave them alone and trust them to do their job.



“WHAT IF I GET STUCK WITH MORE WORK THAN ANYBODY ELSE?”

People feel isolated and unsupported at work. We look around and see who doesn't produce and gets paid more. We spend a lot of time feeling like victims. On the practical side, a ROWE gives you the right to question the work you're doing. If your manager sets unrealistic expectations or piles on too much work then that isn't good for anyone, and in a ROWE, it's your job to stand up for what best serves the business. On the emotional side, you find yourself not caring about other people's level of work. You do your job, you enjoy your freedom, and what other people do or don't do becomes their business.